Title - Gender Identity, Power, and Political Issues in the Fictional Works of Arundhati Roy: A Critical Study

A SYNOPSIS OF THE PROPOSED Ph.D. THESIS

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INTRODUCTION

The literary landscape has always been a powerful medium for exploring and dissecting social issues, with particular emphasis on gender identity, power dynamics, and political complexities. Arundhati Roy, a renowned Indian author, has made significant contributions to this discourse through her fictional and non fictional works. This research proposal aims to conduct a critical study of her novels “The God of Small Things” and “The Ministry of Utmost Happiness” focusing on the intricate interplay of gender identity, power structures and political interference in societal norms and beliefs.

Roy's novels, particularly "The God of Small Things" and "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness," delve into the complexities of societal norms for different genders and politics. Roy’s works often touch upon the themes of gender identity and marginalized communities. This research seeks to unravel the layers of gender identity within her characters, examining how power dynamics shape and are shaped by these identities.

By undertaking a critical analysis, this study aims to contribute to the broader understanding of gender and power dynamics in contemporary literature and society. Furthermore, the analysis aims to examine how patriarchal ideologies are depicted and resisted in both novels, how politics and power structure interfere in the identity of an individual and aims to shed light on the nuanced ways in which gender dynamics are challenged.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Arundhati Roy, born on November 24, 1961, in Shilong, India, is an acclaimed author, activist, and public intellectual who gained international recognition with her novel “The God of Small Things”. Roy has also published several works of non-fiction including “The Algebra of Infinite Injustice”, “Listening to Grasshoppers”and “Broken Republic”. She has also written several non-fiction books including field notes on Democracy, “Walking with the Comrades”, “The End of Imagination”, “Capitalism : A Ghost Story” and most recently “Things that Can and Cannot be Said”, co-authored by John Cusack.

Roy is the receipient of the 2002 Lannan Foundation's Cultural Freedom Award, the 2011 Norman Mailer Prize for distinguished writing and the Ambedkar Sudar Award in 2015 including the Sydney Peace Prize and the Sahitya Academy Award.

She explores a wide range of social issues in her works. Some of the prominent themes include Caste Discrimination, Political Corruption, Environmental Degradation, Class Inequality and the Impact of globalization. Her writings delves into the complexities of these issues offering thought provoking insights and perspective. Her varied experiences and her keen sense of social justice have deeply influenced her writing and activism.

Her Semi-autobiographical work "The God of Small Things", set in the state of Kerala, India gave her literary stardom. In this novel she adopted the techniques of set of flashbacks and a journey through memories as Rahel returns to Aymanam – the fictional town set in Kerala after a long absence. The theme of the novel explores various aspects such as theme of class discrimination, unbounded love and family, also addressing issues of post colonialism, cultural identity and aftermath effects of colonialism on historical identity of a person. The novel won the Man Booker Prize in 1997 and has been translated into more than forty languages and received international critical acclaim.

She is not known only for her contribution in literature but also for her outspoken social and political activism. She has been a critic of globalization, neoliberalism and the adverse effects of policies on marginalized communities.

Previous studies on women's roles, transgender's issues and politics in Roy's novels

Many scholars have explored how Arundhati Roy's female and transgendered characters negotiate their identities within the context of a patriarchal and heterosexual society. They examine how characters like Ammu in "The God of Small Things" and Anjum in "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" confront societal norms and expectations to assert their individuality and autonomy.

Some studies have analyzed how gender intersects with other factors such as class, caste, power structure, political scenario, religion and ethnicity to shape the experiences of female

and transgendered characters. These studies often highlight the complexities of identity formation.

Researchers have examined instances of resistance, rebellion and non-conformity of female characters and how these actions disrupt stereotypes. Various research articles have emphasized on the matter that we as a society do not take into the account the possibility of assimilating the subgroups like the transgender as they are without altering their existing sexual characteristic traits.

Identification of gaps and the need for a critical analysis

Gap is the shortage of comparative studies that analyze multiple works by Arundhati Roy together. Many existing studies bear the tendency to focus on individual novels in isolation. A comparative analysis of Gender, Power and Politics simultaneously can provide a broader perspective by examining common themes, character types, and authorial strategies across multiple works of the same author.

Roy's portrayal of female characters in the novel adds layers of richness and contributes to the overall exploration of power dynamics and gender roles. She sheds light on the societal expectations, restrictions and injustices that third gender often encounters. She presents them as multifaceted individuals, each with their own unique experiences and perspectives.

Her novels often engage with both global and local socio-political issues. A Comparative study can assess how the female and third gender characters face issues such as domestic violence, inequality and societal pressure showcasing the diverse experiences and strength of women. Through their stories, Roy highlights the importance of agency, empowerment and the fight for equality.

In "The God of Small Things", Roy portrays the deeprooted caste system in India and its impact on the lives of the characters. The rigid social hierarchy that penetrates inequality. It sheds light on the struggles and injustices faced by marginalized communities due to caste based discrimination.

In “The Ministry of Utmost Happiness”, she has addressed many issues where Individual characters show their own struggle in various matters like social acceptance of third gender, political interference in the lives of people on both sides of the line of control in Kashmir, the communal atmosphere and many more.

By identifying these gaps and the need for a comparative analysis, this proposal aims to emphasize the unique contributions to the existing researches on Arundhati Roy's novels. It aims to address broader questions about gender, identity, politics, power and literature, contributing to a deeper understanding of how women's and third gender’s roles and power struggle are portrayed in contemporary fiction.

Investigating the representation of political issues in contemporary fiction will contextualize the exploration of political themes in her novels. This proposed research will provide a backdrop for understanding how fictional narratives can serve as a mirror to political realities.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How does Arundhati Roy explore and depict the intersections of gender identity, power dynamics, and political issues in her fictional works ('The God of Small Things' and 'The Ministry of Utmost Happiness') and what insights can be gained from a critical study of these themes?

HYPOTHESIS

Arundhati Roy's fictional works, including 'The God of Small Things' and 'The Ministry of Utmost Happiness,' are likely to reveal a nuanced and intricate portrayal of gender identity, power structures, and political issues.

Through a critical analysis, it is expected that the author employs a unique narrative approach to illuminate the interconnectedness of these themes, contributing to a deeper understanding of societal dynamics and challenges. With underlying messages to analyze the themes from different perspectives and uncover hidden meaning to reveal its core ideas and messages. The

characters and their experiences in Roy's works are hypothesized to serve as mirrors reflecting the complexities of gender relations, power struggles, and political landscapes, thereby offering valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of these social constructs.

OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze the representation of the third gender in Arundhati Roy's novel, “The Ministry of Utmost Happiness”.

2. To examine the portrayal of power structures and their impact on characters' lives in “The God of Small Things” and “The Ministry of Utmost Happiness”.

3. To explore the intersectionality of gender identity and political issues in Roy's narratives.

4. To critically evaluate the implications of Roy's storytelling on contemporary discourses surrounding gender, power, and politics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Queer Theory and its applicability:

Queerness is not merely a desire to marry a same sex partner, it is a politically salient position against exploitation and co-option of identity. Arundhati Roy's book, The Ministry of the Utmost Happiness, is a case study of queer lives within a particular socio political scenario in our society.

It can be seen as a lens through which to analyze and interpret the themes of gender and sexuality. The novel explores sexuality of diverse identities and challenges societal norms, highlighting the experiences of LGBTQ characters.

Queer theory assists in understanding how these characters navigate power dynamics, social constraints and intersections of their identities. It challenges normative ideas of gender and sexuality. While not all of Roy's characters identify as queer, a queer theory approach can explore non-normative sexualities and gender expressions in her novels.

It can be applied to Roy's novel “The Ministry of Utmost Happiness” to explore how character’s gender identity is portrayed, challenged, or reinforced urge to question further and deconstruct traditional notions of gender and sexuality within the context of the story.

Feminist literary theory and its applicability:

Feminist literary theory encompasses a range of approaches and perspectives that analyze literature through the lens of gender and seek to uncover and challenge patriarchal ideologies and representations. Gender criticism examines how gender roles, identities, and expectations are constructed and represented in literature.

Roy's novels often engage with postcolonial themes, making postcolonial feminist theory relevant. It examines how colonialism and imperialism intersect with gender, and it can shed light on how women's identity is affected by postcolonial contexts. She explores the complexities of gender identities and the consequences of breaking societal boundaries through story portrayal which sparks significant discussion about gender norms and liberation.

Psychoanalytic feminist theory, influenced by thinkers like Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, can be applied to analyze characters' subconscious desires, fears, and the ways in which gender roles are internalized and performed.

Textual Analysis:

Another method for this research will be a close textual analysis of Arundhati Roy's novels 'The God of Small Things' and 'The Ministry of Utmost Happiness' with a focus on key characters and their interactions. By dissecting the language, symbolism, and narrative structures, this analysis aims to uncover the nuanced exploration of gender, power, and political issues.

Comparative Analysis:

To enhance the depth of the study, a comparative analysis will be conducted, comparing Roy's works with other contemporary literary works that address similar themes. This comparative approach will offer a broader perspective on the unique contributions of Roy's storytelling and interlinking social issues with the power dynamics in society and policies of government.

RESEARCH COVERAGE / SAMPLING

A close reading of the following texts (The fictional novels by Arundhati Roy) will be done and a meticulous examination of the texts will be done to extract meaningful insights.

1. The God of Small Things (1997) by Arundhati Roy

2. The Ministry of Utmost Happiness (2017) by Arundhati Roy

A close reading and comprehensive study of existing scholarly articles, critical essays, and academic publications related to the novels will be done to extract insights, theories, and interpretations from these sources to support analysis.

To analyze the data collected, critical analysis will be used. To systematically compare and contrast how women and transgenders' place and subjectivity are portrayed in "The God of Small Things" and "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness."

STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH WORK

Chapter –I – Introduction

Chapter –II - Caste and Cultural Consciousness

Chapter –III – Societal Norms and Restrictions

Chapter –IV - Marginality and Subalternity

Chapter –V - Power and Politics

Chapter –VI – Conclusion

CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIELD

The proposed research will contribute to expanding literary analysis by examining the evolving treatment of women's and transgenders' place and political interference in their socio-political condition in Roy's works. It will offer insights into how an author's perspective on gender dynamics evolved over time. The study will contribute to the understanding of

power dynamics, social constraints and politics within the context of the story, emphasizing the importance of considering how multiple aspects of identity intersect to shape individual's experiences. This allows to analyse the characters' experiences, the author's intentions and the broader social commentary within the works.

By analyzing changes in narrative style, the research will try to light on how authors use storytelling techniques to convey evolving themes and perspectives in their writings.

The research will aligns with feminist and queer theory literary critique by exploring women's and transgender's roles, experiences, and identity within the context of broader societal and political structures. The study will promote inclusivity in literature by highlighting the utmost need for giving voice to marginalized characters often on the fringe of society and addressing their plights in narratives.

The comparative analysis will reveal an evolution in her treatment of women's place and identity, offering valuable insights into the intersectionality of women's and transgenders' experiences and the role of literature in portraying diverse voices and struggles of these marginalized sections of society. The analysis sheds light on their experiences, challenges and resilience, offering a powerful portrayal of the complexities faced by marginalized individuals.

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